

**Michigan Department of Natural Resources,  
Wildlife Division**

**Deer Range Improvement Program:**

**2012 Deer Habitat Improvement  
Partnership Initiative**



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## **2012 Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative**

### **Table of Contents**

<b>Section</b>	<b>Title</b>	<b>Page</b>
1.1	Initiative summary	3
1.2	Initiative goals and expectations	3
1.3	Project concept development	4
1.4	Initiative funding	4
1.5	Initiative program authority and decision hierarchy	5
1.6	Project Implementation and Grant process	5
1.7	Eligible land ownerships	6
1.8	Eligible partners	7
1.9	Eligible proposal types	7
2.0	Communications strategy	9
2.1	Public notification process and application timeline	9
2.2	Required application information	10
2.3	Proposal selection process	10
2.4	Proposal criteria and scoring	11
2.5	Compliance monitoring and annual Initiative reporting	13
Appendix A	Public Information Handout	See attachment
Appendix B	Application Form	See attachment
Appendix C	Project Agreement / Release Form	See attachment
Appendix D	Press Release	See attachment
Appendix E	Direct Mailing Letter	See attachment
Appendix F	Proposal Scoring Form	See attachment
Appendix G	Wildlife Division UP Staff Contact List	See attachment
Appendix H	Partner Organization Grants Account Form	See attachment

# **Michigan Department of Natural Resources, Wildlife Division Deer Range Improvement Program 2012 Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative**

## **Program description:**

### **1.1 Initiative summary:**

Wildlife managers have a long successful history of achieving some impressive habitat improvement and wildlife restoration goals. In today's era of wildlife management, wildlife managers realize that we can do even more good for natural resources and be more effective with public involvement and partners than we can alone.

Historically when wildlife professionals have worked with sportsmen's groups on special projects, we have illustrated the conservation principles to those involved with results in the local area. Unfortunately, only a relative handful of sportsmen ever get to view the work up-close. The majority of the public is often unaware of the conservation projects that the Michigan Department of Natural Resources (DNR) embarks upon. We recognize that there is tremendous public appetite for knowledge and involvement in resource management. Working with local individuals and entities, wildlife managers have tremendous opportunities to educate the public and enhance the Department leadership role credibility by showing the results at a local level.

The Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative (hereby referred to as the Initiative) is a Grant program designed to foster productive relationships between the DNR, sportsmen's organizations, concerned citizens and other partners that produce tangible deer habitat improvement benefits and educate the public about the importance of the work and the scientific principles involved in it. This Initiative is targeted for implementation only in the Upper Peninsula (UP) at this time.

This document is designed primarily as a programmatic guide for use by applicants and DNR staff. It is intended to provide basic programmatic information such as: Initiative goals, proposal requirements, eligibility rules, Grant application process, proposal criteria and selection process, funding, and the implementation process.

### **1.2 Initiative goals and expectations:**

The broad purpose of this Initiative is to develop a collaborative approach to deer habitat improvement on private land ownerships across the UP; there are three primary goals and expectations for this Initiative. All projects must address these fundamental goals in order to be considered for approved funding:

1. To produce tangible on-the-ground deer habitat (summer and/or winter range) improvement in the UP that address resource needs.
2. To establish/improve partnerships with sportsmen's organizations and other partners, that will promote long-term cooperative relationships with the DNR.
3. To showcase these cooperative projects through coordinated public relations media outreach. This communications strategy must address two targeted goals - to educate the general public on the specific importance and benefits of the particular habitat improvement project and to feature the cooperative relationship between the DNR and various program partners.

While a less measureable outcome, it is envisioned that this effort will foster increased community level interactions between local area DNR wildlife staff, participating partners and local communities. It is hoped that through this process greater public understanding and support for DNR activities will be garnered.

### **1.3 Project concept development:**

Prospective habitat improvement projects are to be developed by external partner organizations through an application process as outlined in this document and hereby referred to as partner initiated projects. These partner initiated projects are to be generated by eligible partners (see section 1.8 for eligible partner definition) for implementation on an array of eligible ownerships.

It is strongly encouraged that collaborative interactions occur between the respective local DNR wildlife biologist (see Appendix G for Wildlife division UP staff contact list) and the prospective partner organization throughout initial project development process in order to develop acceptable proposals.

### **1.4 Initiative funding and Grant Process:**

All Initiative activities will operate on the State of Michigan's fiscal year calendar schedule, October 1 through September 30. Initiative funding will be from an annual Deer Range Improvement Program (DRIP) fund appropriation. Public Act 106 of 1971 created the DRIP fund, whereby \$1.50 from every deer hunting license sold statewide is allocated into a restricted fund to be exclusively used for the improvement and maintenance of habitat for deer, acquisition of land for deer management, and the payment in lieu of taxes on purchased lands.

New for 2012 the DNR has the authority to expend DRIP funds to support the Initiative formal Grants. However your group may be required to initially incur the expenses associated with implementing the project and submit invoices for reimbursement depending on the nature of the proposed project. In 2012 a total of \$50,000 in DRIP

funds will be made available through a competitive Grant application process. Grant proposals for deer habitat improvement projects seeking a minimum of \$2,000 and up to a maximum of \$10,000 will be considered.

These funds will be administered through the UP Wildlife Management Unit (UPWMU), Private Lands Program. Funds will be allocated across the entire UP based on a competitive Grant application scoring process.

To be considered eligible for consideration all projects, must meet the three Initiative goals. Projects that may require repeat applications for funding in multiple fiscal years will be entertained, but will be limited to the above funding limitations per fiscal year unless there is unrequested leftover funding available within the current fiscal year. Specific multiple-year projects will be limited to 3 years of consecutive DRIP Grant funding eligibility through this Initiative. In the case of multiple-year projects, scheduled deliverables will be required to occur within the fiscal year deadlines as defined within the Agreement Contract and a Grant disbursement rules.

### **1.5 Initiative program authority and decision hierarchy:**

This Initiative is a unique regional program extension of the statewide Deer Range Improvement Program (DRIP). DRIP funds will be the DNR funding source for this Initiative. Wildlife Division will administer these funds through the UPWMU. The UP Private Lands Wildlife Biologist (hereby referred to as the Initiative biologist) has been assigned operational oversight of this Initiative. Normal division chain-of-command will be used for issues requiring higher levels of input and decision.

A collaborative process involving UPWMU staff will be vital to the success of this Initiative. Staff participation in this process will include: fostering development of partnerships, project selection and approval, project implementation, individual project administration, compliance monitoring and reporting, and communications strategy development and implementation. WMU staff will work closely with partner organizations to carry out projects and the associated communications campaigns.

### **1.6 Project Implementation and Grant Process:**

It is the responsibility and an expectation of the Initiative that the partner organization will undertake the primary role in the implementation of an approved Grant project. Where necessary, a local DNR field staff person will be assigned to conduct and assist the on-the-ground implementation of projects. This designated field staff person will coordinate his/her activities with the WMU Supervisor and Initiative biologist. Field staff involvement will ensure that all Grant guidelines and policies are followed. Approved project partnerships will be contractual in nature. DRIP Grant funding is intended to be the initial catalyst for significant projects. Therefore, it is required that partnering organizations actively participate with measurable input into the project

through financial match, cost share, volunteer labor, material contributions, or other in-kind support. Required partner cost share for approved projects is 25% of total costs. Proposed partner cost share and additional contributions to projects will be considered in the scoring process.

Approved Grant projects will require the partnering organization or their representative to be Electronic Funds Transfer (EFT) compliant and a registered vendor of the State of Michigan. This will be necessary to facilitate transfer of Grant funds from the DNR to an approved partner or other service provider. The EFT process will generate a W-9 and 1099 tax form for the approved organization, as required for Grant funds.

Successful applicant organizations and participating landowners will be required to sign a contractual Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative Agreement and liability release (see Appendix C) prior to any implementation. This agreement will specify the project deliverables, clearly define the partner responsibilities, and the minimum duration the project is to be maintained by the applicant. Additionally Successful applicant organizations will need to complete a Partner Organization Grants Account form (see Appendix H). These agreement forms will specify; the partner responsibilities, actual project deliverables, scheduled for implementation and payment, and minimum duration the project is to be maintained by the applicant.

The Grant funding process will require the partner organization to initially incur the expenses associated with implementing the project and submit invoices (with organization name and contact information) for reimbursement (save all original receipts). Scheduled release of Grant funds will occur once certain deliverables/objectives have been completed successfully as defined in the Deer Habitat Improvement Partnership Initiative Agreement. Under some circumstances partial prepayment of Grant funds may be approved depending on the financial nature and time scale of the proposed project.

### **1.7 Eligible land ownerships:**

In 2012 the focus of this Initiative is on improving wildlife habitat on privately owned lands (partner must provide proof of ownership), industrial forest or Commercial Forest Act (CFA) enrolled lands (with appropriate written permission from landowner), federal lands (with appropriate written permission of federal administrator) or other lands with perpetual conservation mandates. Projects on lands owned by municipalities, school forests, or other government entities will be considered lower priority. This is a targeted effort to reach out to partners on lands where the DNR has not traditionally had significant wildlife habitat influence. While not required, private lands with provisions that allow legal public access (foot traffic) for hunting and fishing will be reflected in the project scoring process.

State owned lands are not eligible for Initiative funding in 2012. Currently there are existing mechanisms for partnerships between the DNR and external partners to enhance

state land wildlife habitat. If you are interested in partnering on state lands then you should contact the respective local wildlife biologist or forester as soon as possible to explore feasibility. Be aware that state lands are co-managed between Wildlife and Forest Resources divisions through the state forest compartment review process. Each year approximately 10% of the state forest is evaluated by biologists, foresters and other managers, public input is solicited and treatments are developed. The treatment cycle for the entire forest is ten years. Any proposed state land habitat project is subject to this public input process and respective local forest review schedule.

Initiative projects proposed within any city/municipality limits or within ¼ mile of any paved state highway will be given lower priority so that the projects do not contribute to public safety concerns, vehicle/deer collisions, or deer damage to agriculture or landscaping. The DNR or the State of Michigan will not assume indemnification for liability involving projects undertaken on non-state owned lands.

### **1.8 Eligible partners:**

Group affiliations generally optimize wildlife habitat education and outreach opportunities by actively engaging larger groups concurrently. To be eligible to participate in this initiative, an application must be submitted from a conservation organization, sportsperson group, non-governmental organizations or local Conservation District(s). Recipient organizations must have a formal mission that promotes wildlife conservation and / or hunting, as recognized by the DNR. They may be UP based or local chapters of state, regional or national organizations. Eligible applicants must have a federal tax number or social security number in order to facilitate Grant funding. A partner organization must name a project contact person/representative and include appropriate contact information on the application. Local groups of affiliated hunting partners or adjacent landowners are not considered an eligible organization. Private individuals, non-affiliated groups, private hunting clubs, unrecognized organizations, cities, municipalities, townships, counties, and federal or other state governmental entities/agencies are all ineligible to directly apply for funding from this Initiative. However, they may be third party cooperators on approved projects where appropriate.

Eligible partner organizations may apply for funding for multiple projects in a fiscal year, each of which will be evaluated independently. Eligible partner organizations may not apply for funding for unspecified projects or purposes.

### **1.9 Eligible proposal types:**

All proposals must be compliant with DNR Grant rules, administrative funding mechanism, work rules, union labor contractual language, procedures and policies to be eligible for consideration. Proposals that are not consistent with state or federal law, fail to meet criteria related to the best available science, or that would violate DNR administrative policies will not be considered.

All project proposals must meet the three primary Initiative goals to be eligible: (1) Proposals must produce tangible on-the-ground deer habitat improvement; (2) they must foster productive relationships between the partner organization and the DNR; and (3) they must include a public relations media strategy (see section 2.0).

The DNR is currently identifying landscape level Management Areas (MA) with similar landforms, ecology, management emphasis and other variables across the UP. This concept associates desired habitat conditions with current/desired local landscape conditions and habitat potential with a featured species approach to management. These MA's vary in size and emphasis across the UP. As an example an area with an abundance of early successional forest types (i.e. regenerating young upland deciduous forest types such as aspen) may be managed for sustainability of these habitat attributes and would benefit featured species such as deer, grouse, and woodcock. This management context may have applicability to other adjacent ownerships, including private lands, and may help guide proposal development.

Organizations considering participation in this Initiative are strongly encouraged to contact their local wildlife biologist or the Initiative biologist to collaboratively develop project proposals that are congruent with local MA intent, deer population goals, and other local habitat considerations (see Appendix G for UP Wildlife Staff Contact List).

Examples of desired types of activities proposals could include are: wildlife shrub plantings, tree plantings (i.e. mesic conifers such as white pine or hemlock, oak or other hard mast species, and or fruit bearing or other soft mast species), scarification for regeneration of light seeded tree species, non-commercial timber stand improvement activities, direct mechanical habitat manipulation (i.e. regeneration of aspen or alder habitat), wildlife opening creation/rehabilitation/or existing opening maintenance, approved warm or cool season herbaceous plantings, and plantings of DNR approved perennial grass species.

Specific activities that will not be considered are: creation or maintenance of plantings of annual species grain crops such as corn and root crops (i.e. 'food plots'); plantings of exotics, invasive/non-DNR approved naturalized plant species; other inappropriate planting types; commercial timber sale preparation, and construction of ponds. Location and public safety considerations will be evaluated for each proposal submitted. Proposals that increase: undesired habitat fragmentation; increase wildlife disease transmission potential; have human safety implications; are contrary to current DNR policy and opinion; are contrary to deer population goals (i.e. food plots in Deer Management Units that are over population goals); are non-congruent with the Management Area emphasis; counter to Best Management Practices (BMP's); or will directly have adverse impacts on state or federally listed threatened and endangered species will not be considered.



## **2.0 Communications strategy:**

A required goal for each approved project is a planned communications strategy. Development of the rough framework for this strategy is the responsibility of the partnering organization and need to be included in the application. This framework should include a detailed description of how the local and broader public at large will be informed of: the intended deer habitat and wildlife benefits, the project location, a detailed description of the proposed habitat enhancement activities, and any public education plans, the project cooperators (including the DNR), and the funding sources. It should also include any plans for site signage, local newsprint, radio, television and other media outreach and list specific local media contacts. The partnering organization must be prepared to be an active participant in outreach efforts.

Development of the final communications strategy for projects is expected to be a cooperative venture between the partnering organization and the DNR. The local designated DNR field staff, department Communication Representative, and Initiative biologist will assist in the development of this strategy and the final message content. Coordination and public delivery of the communications message will be at the discretion and direction of the DNR.

The DNR will be responsible for the annual state wide and regional communication for the Initiative. The Initiative biologist will coordinate statewide communications opportunities with the Office of Communications and the UP communications representative.

## **2.1 Public notification process and application timeline:**

In 2012 the following Initiative timeline is being pursued:

Early February- Initiative project application period opens including a direct mailing of application packages to an existing list of UP sportsperson organizations in conjunction with public awareness campaign.

March 31, 2012- Final application deadline.

April 14, 2012- Notification to successful applicants. Implementation of approved projects will commence immediately, dependant upon specific project considerations. All projects required to be fully completed or have specified contractual deliverables completed September 30, 2012 (end of state fiscal year).

In order to optimize public interest in the Initiative, beginning in early February, UP wildlife division will conduct a public education and partnership notification campaign. The goal of this effort will be to notify the UP public at large, affiliated organizations and as many known partners as possible that this initiative is available and to inform them

about the process for application. The Initiative biologist will prepare press release(s) and identify preliminary target audiences and other media materials for this process.

Complete application packages including: application forms, Initiative description and requirements, and related materials are available upon request from Initiative Biologist Bill Scullon, at the Department of Natural Resources, Norway Field Office, 520 West US Hwy 2, Norway MI 49870, telephone 906-563-9247, fax 906-563-5802 or email [Scullonh@michigan.gov](mailto:Scullonh@michigan.gov).

Proposal applications will be due by close of business on March 31, 2012.

A multi-disciplinary selection committee will subsequently evaluate proposed projects based on a transparent scoring process. All projects submitted will be reviewed. Notification of project acceptance or denial will be by April 14, 2012. Implementation of approved projects will be at the discretion / availability of local DNR field staff and other resources as specified in project proposals. Failure to meet project obligations or noncompliance as spelled out in the project contractual agreement will result in project termination and ineligibility for future applications.

## **2.2 Required application information:**

Applicant organizations must meet eligibility requirements and Grant application forms must be completely filled out to be considered. Potential partnering organizations must name a project contact person/representative and include contact information. Additional sheets may be attached to fully describe the proposed project in detail including its expected habitat benefits and media strategy. It is strongly encouraged that applications be as detailed as possible since they will be evaluated competitively. The project proposal must provide: an itemized estimate of project costs, materials and any other related expenditure(s); detailed description of how the sponsoring organization plans to provide the required 25% project cost share (i.e. through direct financial contribution, any in-kind contributions, materials, volunteer labor person-hours, etc.); the legal location description of project; acreage estimate and any relevant maps must be provided. Written documentation of third party landowner permission for the proposed activity must be included. Specific local recommendations for any contractual service providers should be included. Project proposals should not be viewed as final and they may be subject to modification by the DNR to use the best available science, overcome logistical and feasibility issues, and be in compliance with union labor agreements.

## **2.3 Proposal selection process:**

Immediately following the application deadline, a multi-disciplinary selection committee will convene to review proposals and select projects to be funded. This selection committee may be composed of; the Initiative biologist, UP WMU Supervisor or designee(s), a representative of Forest Resource Division, a UP Natural Resource

Commissioner (NRC) as available, UP Communications Representative. Other DNR staff and WLD field staff (i.e. Private Lands Coordinator, and/or Forest Cultivation Specialist) may be involved as necessary. The selection committee may approve, disapprove, or make modifications to project(s). Partners who submit projects that are not approved will be provided feedback from the selection committee. Disapproved proposals with subsequent modifications may be resubmitted the following fiscal year. Selection committee decisions will be final.

The selection and project scoring process is designed to be standardized, treat all applicants fairly and be as transparent as possible. All project applicant(s) will receive feedback on the status of their project proposal by April 14, 2012.

## **2.4 Proposal criteria and scoring:**

Grant proposals will be evaluated for completeness, inclusion of all three primary Initiative goals and requirements, and meeting the six proposal criteria. This will be numerically scored by the selection committee. This is a competitive process for limited funds. The selection committee will use scientific principles, professional experience and judgment in scoring proposals. A gradient scale will be used to evaluate the proposal on the criteria. The lower the individual criteria score on a scale of 1 to 5 indicates a lower priority assessment. The final total score for a given proposal will be based on a compilation of values for each of the six criteria. The maximum score a proposal can receive is 30. The minimum score a project can receive and still be considered eligible for funding is 14.

The six proposal evaluation criteria are presented in no particular order:

1. Production of tangible deer habitat enhancement benefits. Producing summer and / or winter range deer habitat improvement benefits which are congruent with the Management Area emphasis, deer population and habitat goals should be the intended goal. Proposals which produce on-the-ground improvements that are visible to the public are desirable. Long-term and short-term projects will be considered. Short-term projects are those considered to have limited duration of wildlife benefit (i.e. one to three years in duration). Long-term projects are those which may produce lasting benefits and may take extended periods of time to mature and materialize (i.e. decades in the case of tree plantings). *Criteria scoring will be on a scale of 1 to 5 for expected tangible deer habitat enhancement produced via the project (i.e. a score of 1 for proposals with little or no acceptable tangible benefits to a score of 5 being for proposals with measurable and / or lasting acceptable tangible benefits).*
2. Proposal logistical feasibility. Limitations of DNR staff time, availability of equipment or other logistical resources required to carry out the project will impact feasibility. Habitat suitability, soils, topography, forest stands composition or other site factors should contribute to any proposed project rather

than be additional hurdles to impede success. Additional pre-identified barriers to success will influence a proposal's likelihood of being approved and funded. Probability of success is directly proportional to feasibility.

*Criteria scoring will be on a scale of 1 to 5 for project feasibility (i.e. with a score of 1 being for relatively unfeasible proposals with significant logistical and site factor hurdles to a score of 5 for proposals being highly feasible with few predictable hurdles).*

3. Public accessibility and / or proximity to public lands. While public access is not a requirement, projects that occur on lands legally open to multi-use public recreation will be scored more favorably than those on lands without public access. The closer the proximity to public lands (either state or federal) the better. *Criteria scoring will be on a scale of 1 to 5 for project location and public access considerations (i.e. with 1 being proposals inaccessible by the public and disjunct from public lands, greater than 5 miles, to a score of 5 for being accessible to the public and / or in close proximity to public lands, less than 5 miles).*
4. Partner organization's experience successfully completing similar projects. Affiliated organizations with a proven record of experience in completing successful field-based projects will be beneficial compared to those who are inexperienced. Applicant organizations with a successful history of collaborative ventures with the DNR will be helpful but not essential. *Criteria scoring will be on a scale of 1 to 5 for partner experience (i.e. a score of 1 for partners with no demonstrated experience successfully conducting field-based projects to a score of 5 for partners with a proven track record of implementing multiple field-based projects).*
5. Partner cost share and participation in the project implementation. Since funding for this Initiative is limited, the ability of project partners to provide measurable financial assistance (25% required project cost share). This can be accomplished through direct financial contribution to the project, in-kind services, materials, labor, or other resource contributions to the project. Partners who commit to actively participate in and directly perform or complete projects themselves with minimal DNR staff presence or administration will be evaluated more favorably than those who cannot. *Criteria scoring will be on a scale of 1 to 5 for partner cost share and participation (i.e. a score of 1 for partners with no plan for any type of material contribution or active involvement and relying heavily on DNR resources to complete the proposal, to a score 5 for proposal with a plan for primarily partner implementation, material / labor / financial contributions and requiring very little DNR resources to complete the proposal).*
6. The inclusion of a communications strategy. Development of the rough framework for this strategy is the responsibility of the partnering organization. An effective strategy framework or detailed plan for meeting the requisite public

relations obligations is required for every proposal. This strategy should include specific plans or ways to educate the public on the importance and benefits of the habitat improvement project. The strategy should also include detailed plans for showcasing the project and the partnership between the DNR and the partner organization in the local media outlets. The communications strategy should include a list of local media contacts to be used or any other specific outreach tools (i.e. signage). The partnering organization should be prepared to be an active participant in outreach efforts.

Development of the final communications strategy for projects is expected to be a cooperative venture between the partnering organization and the DNR. The local designated DNR field staff, UP Communications Representative, and Initiative biologist will assist in the development of this final strategy and the message content. Coordination and public delivery of the final communications message will be at the discretion and direction of the DNR.

*Criteria scoring will be on a scale of 1 to 5 for assessing the effectiveness of proposed communication strategy (i.e. a score of 1 for proposals with little or poorly developed communications strategy, to a score of 5 for proposals with a well developed and detailed communications strategy).*

## **2.5 Compliance monitoring and annual initiative reporting:**

For all approved projects, the organizations representative will be required to periodically report to the Initiative biologist or designated DNR field staff on the project status, expenditures to date, future objectives to be completed, and estimated timeline for completion throughout the implementation process. It will be the field staff responsibility to certify final project status, billing, acreage or other quantifiable outcomes, compliance, any subsequent issues that arose, and other administrative details to the Initiative biologist at the conclusion of a project (final deadline is end of Fiscal Year on September 30, 2012). This assessment should indicate whether or not the partner complied with the intended contract obligations. An effort to include an assessment of project effectiveness should be considered, but an accurate assessment of effectiveness may not be evident for some time, dependent on the nature of the project or its intended habitat goals. This assessment will be provided directly to the Initiative biologist and will be used in evaluating Initiative progress and any subsequent refinements.

All approved projects will require post-implementation compliance monitoring by the designated local DNR field staff. Following the completion of the project, a subsequent periodic compliance monitoring will take place for a predetermined (as specified in contractual agreement) time period to determine if the partner organization full filled all requirements. The DNR reserves the right to access the project for compliance monitoring for the period specified in the contract agreement.

After implementation, it is suggested that each project be evaluated periodically by assigned DNR field staff for post-implementation effectiveness. The partner organization

is strongly encouraged to participate in any effectiveness monitoring. Effectiveness monitoring methodology needs to be efficient, simple and capable of assessing fundamental evaluations of project habitat manipulation success or failure. The methodology employed should be able to reasonably explain conclusions regarding the project's immediate impact/outcome.

The Initiative biologist is responsible for production of a comprehensive annual report summarizing all Initiative activities at the conclusion of the fiscal year to be available for public review. The Initiative biologist will work with the Office of Communications to prepare statewide public relations media materials based on the annual Initiative activities.